



# THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION  
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

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## BUFFALO BILL AND THE MAD HERMIT

OR  
FINDING A LOST TRAIL



BY  
THE AUTHOR OF  
'BUFFALO BILL'

"NOW YOU'LL SEE ME LASSO A GHOST," SAID BUFFALO BILL, SWINGING THE LARIAT.





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## BUFFALO BILL AND THE MAD HERMIT;

OR,

## Finding a Lost Trail.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE TRAILER.

In the Montana wilderness, standing beside his horse, on an autumn afternoon, some years ago, was a man of majestic presence.

Tall, broad-shouldered, erect as a soldier, he stands with his hands resting upon the muzzle of his repeating rifle, while his eyes roam with admiration over the vast expanse.

He is clad in buckskin leggins and hunting jacket, top cavalry boots, a wide-brimmed sombrero of dove color, and about his waist is a belt containing a bowie and a pair of revolvers.

He stands upon the brow of a cliff, with a surging

river two hundred feet below him, and which would receive his form did he take one step forward.

In the near background is his horse—a large, long-bodied bay, with clean limbs, an arching neck, and accoutered with a Mexican saddle and bridle, haversack, roll of blankets, saddle blanket and one holster revolver.

The man is Buffalo Bill, the bold scout of the plains, and sheer love of adventure has made him penetrate far into that wild land, a score of years ago, when settlements and forts were few and far between, and that he might be able to tell his comrades about the campfires of this section of wonder-land.



Strange stories had floated about the army camp-fires in that borderland, of gold mines in the Rocky Mountains, hidden away from all but a few daring spirits, of a score of bold pioneers who had settled in some Edenlike valley; and Buffalo Bill, utterly fearless, had dared to penetrate these boundless solitudes to see whether, indeed, men had boldly ventured life and all by invading this weird domain.

Mounted upon his splendid bay, his companion in many a long and deadly trail, he had ventured forth alone, giving to his comrades no limit as to how long he would remain away, and smiling grimly when they urged him not to go.

Thus days passed away, and we find him standing in the very midst of the wilderness of mountains.

Not a fellow-being has he seen since leaving camp, and a struggle with a huge bear, an attack by a party of hungry wolves, had been his only adventures, thus far.

He does not believe that a human being is within a hundred miles of him, and yet there is no danger that he dreads to meet and bravely overcome.

"This solitude is so impressive—this silence so deep—I only wish there were some human being near to break the charm," said Buffalo Bill, aloud, little dreaming that there was one human being near, one approaching him with the noiseless footfalls of a tiger about to spring upon its prey.

A startled snort from his horse caused the scout to turn quickly, and his rifle was at a ready in an instant.

It was a man his eyes rested upon, and yet one who might, at first glance, hardly be taken for such.

A man, tall, powerful in build, clad in a garb of skins of wild beasts, and wearing upon his head an oddly-made cap of birds' feathers.

His feet were clad in moccasins of rudely-tanned leather, his neck was encircled by a necklace of

grizzly claws, a huge knife was in his belt, and in his hands was an enormous bow with one arrow, long and sharp as a needle, set, and covering the scout.

At the back of the man's belt were several quivers of bark, filled with half a score of arrows, each of a like pattern with the dangerous-looking one he held ready to let fly at the heart of Buffalo Bill.

The face of the man was a study, for it was brown as an Indian's; the features visible above his long beard bold and determined, and yet wearing a look of settled woe.

His beard was iron gray, as was his hair, and both were long and unkempt, while his eyes were almost fierce in their expression.

Buffalo Bill saw that the strange being had him covered, that before he could throw his rifle to his shoulder and pull trigger, the arrow could be let fly, and he noted that the hand that held the bow was firm as steel.

Had it been a redskin he had to face, or a dozen of them, he would have at once opened fire.

As it was, this was a white man, and one whom he had little dreamed of meeting in that wilderness of mountains.

His attitude, too, was hostile; yet the scout did not show the slightest feeling of dread, and said, in his light-hearted way:

"Hello, old Rip Van Winkle, where did you spring from?"

The strange man eyed the scout fixedly, seemingly trying to stamp his face and form in his mind, and responded:

"You is Buffalo Bill, hain't yer?"

"So men call me; but how is it you know me?"

"First, I know no other man w'u'd dar' come inter ther mountains alone; and, next, I recalls yer from what I hes heerd you was like."



"And who are you, may I ask?"

"I don't know," was the simple response, and the man lowered his bow, placing the arrow in his belt, ready for instant use if need be.

Buffalo Bill at once slung his rifle at his back, and stepped toward the old man, while he asked, in a kindly way:

"Don't you know who you are?"

"No, for I has forgot my name, and much else has gone from my mind, sin' I hev been roaming about these mountains."

"And what are you doing here, old man?"

"Lookin' fer a lost trail," was the calm reply.

"What trail?"

"The trail of a devil! the trail of an angel!" came the savage reply.

"Poor old man, you have, indeed, had a hard lot of it; but you will go with me, now I have found you, back to the fort and settlements, where friends will care for you," said Buffalo Bill, realizing that the old man was demented.

"Never!" came in a deep voice.

"You will not return with me?"

"Never! for did I not tell you I was looking for a lost trail?" he said, petulantly.

"But you cannot find it?"

"I can and will!"

"See here, Buffalo Bill, I came into these mountains following a trail, two years ago, and I sunk down by the way, sick and delirious.

"Why the wolves did not devour me, God only knows; but they did not, and after lying for days, raving with fever, I came to my senses once more, and tried to keep on the trail I had been following.

"But memory seemed to have gone from me, Buffalo Bill, and I have never found it since, though I have hunted day after day until, counting the moons

as they came and went, twenty-four have I seen fill and wane; and yet I cannot find him."

"Find who?" asked the scout.

"Ther devil."

The scout felt assured that the old man was insane, but how he got into that far-away land was a mystery, and he meant to solve it.

So he said:

"Well, I am trying to keep the devil off of my trail, and here you are trying to get on his, old man; but, never mind; you go with me, and he shall not trouble you any more?"

"I go from here and not find her?" he asked, fiercely.

"Find who?"

"Angel."

Buffalo Bill shook his head sadly, and, seeing it, the old man said, quickly:

"You thinks I am mad, Buffalo Bill, and I suppose that I am; but thar is method in my madness, fer I are s'archin' fer ther trail o' one I knows is a devil, though he be in ther form o' a man, and she whom he tuk away with him—stole from my home—are an angel, ef God ever 'lows a leetle gal ter be a angel afore he takes 'em up ter heavin.

"Ah! Buffalo Bill, I am mad—yes, a poor, old, mad trailer in these mountains, but ontill I dies I'll never give up lookin' fer thet man, and some day I will find him and so deep will be my vengeance upon him thet my own lips will pray ter ther Mighty Chief up yonder ter hev mercy on thet poor wretch," and he spoke with a manner that was majestic, while he pointed upward as he referred to God, as the Mighty Chief, in a way that was most impressive.

His words touched the scout deeply, for he, too had begun to feel that, although the old trailer was mad, there was some mysterious method in his madness.



## CHAPTER II.

## THE FATAL SHOT.

Three years before the strange meeting of Buffalo Bill and the mad trailer, a man was riding slowly along through the Rocky Mountains, following an indistinct trail that led across the valley.

He was a person of fine appearance, with long, black hair and beard, and a face intelligent, handsome and fearless.

He was dressed in a much-worn suit, such as miners are wont to wear; his sombrero was in tatters, and his general appearance was that of one who had been a long time absent from camp.

Although armed with a rifle and a revolver, his weapons were rusty, and his saddle and bridle seemed to have had hard usage.

But his face wore a pleased expression, and he was singing in a loud tone a verse of "Home, Sweet Home."

"Another twelve hours and I will be at home, and then no more poverty, no more toil, for I have that here which makes me a millionaire," and he tapped his breast lightly as he spoke.

"Six months ago I left Nellie, telling her I would bring back to her a fortune, and I have kept my word, for here I have the proof that I possess millions."

Suddenly, as the last words left his lips, there came a puff of smoke from a small thicket on one side, a crack of a rifle followed, and the horseman reeled in his saddle, clutched at the air and fell to the ground heavily, while his startled horse bounded away for a few rods, and then, turning about, trotted back to the side of his prostrate master, giving a low, sympathetic neigh as he did so.

At the same moment a man sprang out of the thicket from whence had come the shot, and, rifle in

hand, approached the form his deadly aim had laid low.

He was a man of perhaps thirty-five, his face bearded, his hair long, and with a sinister, reckless look upon his darkly-bronzed face.

He was clad in a miner's costume, but looked more neat than the ordinary run of men of his class, while his face and manner bore indications of refinement not often seen upon that wild border.

Approaching the man who, a moment before, had been so full of hope and joy, he saw that he was alive, yet, without doubt, fatally wounded.

The wounded man started as his eyes met those that gazed down upon him, and he said hoarsely:

"Carter Creighton, it is you?"

"Yes, Roy Ripley, you have almost as good a memory as I, for it has been over twelve years since last you saw me," responded the assassin, coolly.

"Yes, and you have kept your vow, that you would have revenge upon me for marrying your cousin Nellie?"

"Yes, I loved her with all my soul, and she threw me aside for you—gave up wealth for poverty, and became your wife.

"She has suffered bitterly, and she has made my life a curse, for I became reckless, was expelled from college, went from bad to worse, until I became a gambler, and then drifted out here to the mines.

"One day I shot a young fellow over a game of cards, and his friends wished to give him a decent burial, so one went after an old trapper, who lived some distance from the mining camps, and who, it was said, had been a clergyman.

"He came, and, seeing him, I thought of you, somehow, though his hair and beard were gray, and he was dressed in buckskin, and I recalled how your father had been an Episcopal clergyman in a Vir-



ginla village, and had, one night, in self-defense, taken the life of a human being, and which had so weighed upon him that he had come to the far West to live, away from those who had known him.

"He had preached in the camps, where no one knew him, nor the sorrow that bowed him down, and he devoted himself to trapping, living in a cabin, he told me, with his little family.

"They called him the Trapper Parson, and he said that his name was Ripley, and that he had been a clergyman, and then I knew that he was your father.

"Well, he buried the young man I killed, and returned to his home.

"But I trailed him back, saw Nellie, your wife, and your daughter Rose, though they did not see me.

"By inquiry at a settler's house some miles away, I learned that you had gone on a prospecting tour in the mountains after gold.

"I knew you would be successful, for I, too, had believed there was gold where you had gone, and I determined then upon my revenge.

"I camped on your trail, the one I knew you must come, and I have waited long for your coming; but you lie there at my feet, Roy Ripley, and my revenge is complete."

The man had spoken in the calmest manner possible, his face full of hatred and triumph commingled.

The dying man had breathed heavily, but uttered no word, while his eyes were fixed upon the face of his foe.

As the assassin ceased speaking, he said, in a voice that was getting husky with the approach of death:

"Carter Creighton, you have had your revenge, so now do one act for a dying man, as you hope for God's mercy hereafter."

"What would you have me do?"

"You were right in supposing I would be success-

ful, for I have found a fortune in mines in the mountains."

"You went alone?" asked the assassin, quickly.

"Yes."

"And you alone know of these mines?"

"No one else, and I was happy in the thought of giving riches and joy to those I love, when your bullet awoke me from my dreaming."

"I, too, had rude awakenings in the past, Roy Ripley, through you."

"Bring not up your revengeful feelings again, for see you not that I am dying? What sorrow you had through me is more than avenged.

"Now let me beg of you to do what I ask!"

"Well?"

"Will you grant my dying request?"

"Yes."

"You swear it?"

"I do."

"By your hopes of heaven?"

"I do."

"In my pocket there is a map of the region where lie those mines, and the way to reach there, which is most necessary, for without the trail well marked no one would ever find them.

"When I am dead, take this map and papers to my wife, and tell her it is my legacy to her and to our darling Rose, and say to my father that I make him their guardian, and to see that they get the riches I have found.

"Do you understand, Carter Creighton?"

"Every word."

"Then, may Heaven deal with you as you act toward them and obey the wishes of a dying man, one whom your own hand shot down."

"The voice had suddenly become strong, and the eyes seemed to blaze with the intensity of feeling



that was felt by the man who lay prone upon the ground, and his slayer turned away from their soul-rending glance and shuddered.

When he again looked down upon the form at his feet his eyes fell upon the face of the dead.

At the same moment he heard the clatter of hoofs, and, looking up quickly, cried:

"By Heaven! it is the Parson Trapper himself!"

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE TRAPPER PARSON.

The one whom the assassin had seen coming toward him, dashing suddenly out of a clump of timber that bordered a small river running through the valley, was a man strangely like the one who lay dead at the feet of the one who had slain him.

A man of fifty-five he looked, though his long, flowing hair and beard, turning gray, gave him the appearance of a patriarch.

His was a kindly face, sunburnt, rugged and full of intelligence, though with a certain look of sorrow that seemed indelibly stamped upon his features.

He was armed with a rifle of ancient pattern, a revolver and a hunting-knife, and even to his moccasined feet was clad in buckskin, while his head was surmounted with a cap made of wolfskin.

His horse was thin, wiry, and, like his master, was evidently well along in years.

It was the Trapper Parson, and he had been riding along a distant ridge, when his eyes had fallen upon a horseman in the valley.

Instantly he had taken from his case an old-fashioned spyglass, and fixed it upon the stranger, who was fully a mile distant.

"It's my son, if my old eyes do not deceive me!" he cried, in a voice that rung with gladness, and, wip-

ing the glass carefully, he again turned it upon the horseman.

As he did so he beheld a white puff of smoke come out of a thicket, he saw the arms of the rider wave wildly, and then the horse dash away, as his master fell from the saddle.

"God have mercy!" came through his shut lips, and he brushed his eyes, as though he could not believe his own sight, and once more turned his glass upon the spot in the valley where a strange tragedy had suddenly flashed before his vision.

There lay the rider, and his horse had returned to his side, while a man was visible, calmly walking toward the spot.

It was no hallucination, but a deadly reality, and quickly he urged his horse down the hillside, across the plain toward the river, and, reaching it, into the flowing waters.

Across the stream his true horse swam, up the other bank he struggled, then out of the timber into the open plain he dashed, straight toward the spot where one man lay dead, another, his slayer, standing over him.

The face of the Trapper Parson was livid, the kindly expression was gone, and there dwelt upon every feature a look of stern resolve.

The murderer saw him coming, and recognized the old clergyman who had once buried a victim of his deadly aim; knew him as the father of the man he had just slain.

How should he meet him? Could he lie to him about the death of his son, saying he had found him there, dying?

Should he meet the Trapper Parson as his foe, and let the best man win?

He had to decide quickly upon his course, and one glance into that hard, stern, pallid face, and he knew that he must fight.



So he threw his rifle to his shoulder, and cried, in a sharp, commanding voice that many had known better than not to heed:

"Halt, old man, for this is not my work!"

"Assassin! you lie!" came back in stentorian tones.

"I say no! Halt, or I will fire on you!" thundered the man, standing at bay.

"No, you killed him, and it shall be your life or mine!" cried the Parson Trapper, and he threw forward his revolver to fire.

As he did so, the man at bay brought his rifle to his shoulder and pulled the trigger.

There followed only a click.

"Curses! I forgot to reload after my shot!" he said, savagely, and, throwing the weapon down, he drew a revolver; but, ere he could draw trigger, the Parson Trapper fired, and Carter Creighton dropped in his tracks, the bullet leaving its mark over his temple.

But, unheeding him, the Parson Trapper threw himself from his horse and dropped on his knees by the body of his son.

"Oh Heaven, spare him! Speak, Roy, speak to me!"

It was pitiful to see the old man's grief as he bent over the motionless form, urging him to speak to him only one word.

"Ha! He is warm! He may not be dead, but unconscious, though his pulse seems not to beat, nor his heart to throb," and he dropped his ear down upon the broad breast.

"He may yet live! I will take him home, and, if aught can bring him back to life, Nellie can."

Springing to his feet, he led his son's horse near, and, raising the body in his arms, with a wonderful exhibition of strength, he mounted with it, and, call-

ing to his own animal to follow, he started off at a rapid gallop, wholly forgetting the man he had shot down but a moment before.

On, on he went through the valley, the strong horse keeping up his steady gallop, while behind came the Trapper Parson's animal close on his heels.

Miles were gone over, and, at last, under the shelter of a distant ridge, a cabin appeared in view.

It was a large structure, of several rooms, well built; had a handsome look, with its stable near, a cow grazing not far distant, and scores of chickens feeding about, while a fenced-in patch down in the valley was a well-cultivated garden.

A pleasant home, miles from the nearest neighbor, and a home in which peace and contentment reigned, and refinement held sway, even in that far frontier land.

Before the door was seated a woman, engaged in sewing upon a homespun dress, and a short distance from her sat a young girl, with a book in her hand.

They were mother and daughter, and both were beautiful, the one possessing the matronly beauty that comes to woman after passing the threshold of thirty years, and the other the sparkling loveliness of early girlhood, for she was just entering her teens.

"See, is not that your grandfather coming?" and Mrs. Ripley pointed to a horseman who had just emerged from the woodland in the valley.

"Yes, mamma, and he is carrying something in his arms; it is a man, and he must be wounded."

Mrs. Ripley had also seen that the Trapper Parson was holding a form in his arms, and, springing to the cabin door, she took from a shelf a large fieldglass.

A moan escaped her lips as she leveled it upon the approaching horseman, and at the same time beheld a loose horse trot up behind the ridden one.

"Rose, your father is wounded—perhaps dying—perhaps dead!"



She spoke in a disjointed way, and sank back into her chair, while Rose bounded away like a deer to meet her grandfather and discover the truth.

"Oh, grandfather! it is papa, and he is dead!" cried the girl, as she dashed up and met the old man and beheld the corpse-like face.

"He is dead, I fear, Rose; but spring upon my horse and ride with all speed to Powell's, and ask him to come here, for he was an army surgeon, and no man can do more than he can, if my poor son is not dead."

But Rose did not hear his last words, for already had she leaped, just as she was, into the saddle, and old Goliath, as the horse was called, had never been sent along at such a breakneck pace before in all his long experience in the mountains, not even when flying from pursuing Indians.

And on to the cabin rode the trapper, his face white and stern almost as the face of his dead son, while he would hope against hope that one little spark of life yet remained in the splendid form which Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout, could bring back into full flame once more.

As he approached, Mrs. Ripley shook off the emotion that nearly overpowered her, and, rising, advanced toward the old man.

"Give him to me, father," she said, hoarsely, and when the body slid down into her arms, she held it firmly, kissing over and over again the cold face.

"You have come back to me, Roy, as you promised.

"You have come back to me, dead!" she said, in a voice that did not quiver, and then the trapper, who had dismounted, bore the body into the cabin and laid it upon the bed.

"I had hoped, my child, there was life still left, and so I sent Rose after Powell."

"Frank Powell's skill can do no good now, father. But how did it happen?"

"I saw him riding along the valley, and, as I recognized him through my glass, for I was a long way off, I saw a puff of smoke from a thicket, and he fell from his saddle."

The old man spoke in a low, calm voice, and the woman listened eagerly to each word; but, as he concluded, she cried:

"Murdered! he was murdered! then, sure as there be a God above, his murderer shall die for this cruel deed!"

Her voice rang like a trumpet, and she held her hands aloft, as she bent over the dead body, in an appeal to Heaven to hear her threat.

"My child, he is dead!" solemnly said the old man.

"And you killed the slayer of my husband and your son, father?"

"Yes, my poor child, I rode up on him as he stood by the side of my dead boy, and he leveled his rifle at me, but it did not go off, while my revolver did, and he fell in his tracks."

"Roy! Roy! can you hear? Your father has avenged you, Roy!" and the woman bent again over the dead form, while the old man turned away, muttering to himself:

"Merciful Heaven! She has gone mad!"

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## CHAPTER IV.

### DON, THE MONTE MAN.

Months have passed since Roy Ripley, the miner, returned to his cabin home in the valley—returned a dead man.

Like the wind had Rose ridden after Frank Powell, known in the camps and among the scattering settlements as the Surgeon Scout, and the noble man had ridden at full speed at the appeal of the girl, leav-



ing her far behind on her tired horse, while he pressed on to save life if in his power.

But one look told him that the miner was dead, one glance told him that the loving wife had lost her reason from the shock, for her husband had been her earthly idol; for him she had given up a luxurious home, been cast off by her rich and aristocratic kindred, and struggled through life in poverty with him.

"It will kill her! she will die of a broken heart within six months!" Frank Powell had said to a settler, who had happened in, and they sought the Trapper Parson to tell him how closely she must be guarded, how tenderly she must be nursed.

But nowhere could the trapper be found, and for hours he was absent, until Frank Powell became most anxious for him as the hours passed on toward midnight.

Then he suddenly glided into the cabin and motioned to the surgeon to come out.

"Doctor, I've been back to bury the man I shot—the man who killed my poor boy.

"I did not wish him to be torn to pieces by wolves, to lie unburied, and so I went to do my duty by the dead, forgetting what he was in life."

"Trapper, you are a noble man to do a deed like this," said the Surgeon Scout, touched by the human nature in the old trapper.

"Doctor, I meant well by him; but let me tell you that he was not there."

"Yet you shot him?"

"Yes, for I saw him, from afar off, shoot down my boy from an ambush, and I brought upon him, as I believed, a just retribution, for he also would have killed me as I rode upon him.

"I saw him fall, saw my bullet cut into his head over the temple, and he fell in his tracks, while I, forgetting him, took my son in my arms before me on

the saddle, and hastened home, hoping he was not dead and that you might save him.

"When I returned, I saw where he had lain, for the ground was reddened by his blood.

"I saw where he had ridden into the ambush, to wait for my son, where he had hitched his horse, and where he stood when he fired the fatal shot, and I tracked his footsteps, which seemed uncertain, wavering, from where he had lain, back to his horse.

"Then he rode to the river and dressed his wound, and thence away down the valley; but as night came on I started homeward again."

"This is a strange story, Trapper Ripley; but the fact is your bullet merely stunned the man."

"Yes, without doubt."

"Did you know the man?"

"It seemed to me that I had seen him before, but when or where I could not tell, and I only caught sight of his face as I rode upon him."

"Well, to-morrow we will bury your son, and then I will strike the trail of this assassin and see if I can follow it to the end, and, if so, he shall answer to me for his red work that has fallen so bitterly upon you and poor little Rose."

Then Frank Powell told the old trapper how tenderly he must nurse the stricken wife, and he remained at the cabin until Roy Ripley was laid in his grave over in a little dell, and then, leaving a couple of kind-hearted settlers and their wives at the desolate home, the brave Surgeon Scout took up the trail of the assassin.

For several days he was gone, and then he returned to say that he had tracked the murderer far up in the mountains, and that he had seemed to be following the trail of Roy Ripley in coming home.

But there he had lost all trace, and, superb tracker that he was, he was forced to give it up.



"And what think you, Dr. Powell, was his reason for following the trail left by my son?" asked the trapper.

"He doubtless believed that he had discovered a gold mine, and sought to track him back to it, having first taken his life."

"Yes, that was his motive, without doubt, and he has escaped a just retribution."

"Yes, for the present, Mr. Ripley; but murder will out, and some day that man may be brought face to face with his deed."

"And what do you think of my sorrowing daughter, for she is as dear as though she were my own flesh and blood?"

And the old trapper sighed and eagerly awaited the response.

"My dear Mr. Ripley, it is my duty to tell you the truth—she will die soon!"

Dr. Powell spoke the truth, for the woman died the next night.

And little Rose, with a heart full of grief, cheered up for her grandfather's sake, cheered him by song and pleasant words, went with him on his hunting trips and trapped and fished, riding ever by his side, carrying a rifle and revolver, and becoming an expert with both.

Thus these two became wrapped up in each other, and life seemed really worth the living to the old hermit parson.

One day, when out hunting together, the two were set upon by half a score of mounted warriors.

The trapper, with his grandchild's life at stake, fought with desperation, and Rose, too, stood at bay and shot down a huge brave who would have seized her in his arms to bear her off a captive.

But the Indians knew their strength, and were making a bold dash, when suddenly a horseman

dashed upon the scene, a revolver flashing forth deadly music in either hand, and in terror the redskins fled, leaving several of their number upon the field.

The gallant rescuer gave chase for a short distance, and then returned to those who owed so much to him.

He was a man of perhaps thirty-five, remarkably well preserved for his age; wore a long, drooping mustache, and possessed a face that was most attractive, as far as the perfection of manly beauty was concerned, while, otherwise, it seemed a face to dread, so cynical was it, so reckless.

He was dressed in a style that was not common on the border, for his suit was dark-blue corduroy, of stylish cut, the jacket being short, and the pants stuck in the tops of cavalry boots, on the heels of which were a pair of silver spurs.

A sash was about his waist, and in this were thrust the silver-mounted revolvers which had done such good service against the Indians, along with a bowie knife of rare workmanship.

He carried no rifle, but a lariat hung at the horn of his silver-bespangled Mexican saddle, and his general appearance, with his black sombrero, embroidered on the crown and rim, gave him the air of having come from the land beyond the Rio Grande, an appearance which his darkly-bronzed face and long black hair and mustache carried out.

His horse was a fine one, as black as night, and seemed to be in keeping with his reckless, handsome master.

In the fight the trapper had been wounded through the arm, but he welcomed his rescuer heartily as he rode back from his chase of the Indians.

"I have not the pleasure of knowin' yer name, pard," said the Trapper Parson, dropping into the



dialect of the border, which he often used with seeming unconsciousness, though he never used it in addressing his granddaughter.

"In the camps, sir, I am called 'The Don,' and also 'The Monte Man,' for my occupation, or, say my profession, is that of a gambler."

The old trapper seemed deeply pained to hear this frank confession; but then he knew life on the frontier pretty well, and that there were brave men and true there who were gamblers and nothing else.

So he said nothing, and, as the stranger seemed to wish to give him no name, he called him simply Don, and Rose followed her grandfather's example.

From that day the Monte Man became a frequent visitor at the trapper's cabin, and both the old man and the young girl seemed to become greatly attached to him, and they told him of their sorrows in the past, and their simple lives in the present.

The Don dwelt over in the mining camp of Sawdust City, where the trapper was wont to go and buy his supplies each month, and on such occasions he heard of his rescuer as the most reckless man in the mines, and the boldest gambler, while he had taken life several times when pressed by his adversaries in a game of cards.

Still he was ever kind to Rose and himself, seeming to possess a second nature when visiting them, and the trapper was glad to have him come to his little home in the hills.

One day the trapper came home, after a long hunt in the mountains.

He did not see Rose running out to meet him, as was her wont always, and he rode up to the cabin with an anxious face.

There his eyes fell upon a placard upon the door, and, with pallid cheeks and quivering voice, he read aloud:

"Fourteen years ago, old man, your son, Roy Ripley, stole from me Nellie Creighton, the maiden that I hoped to have made my wife, and it wrecked my life and made me what I now am.

"It was I who tracked Roy Ripley from the recesses of the mountains, where I felt assured that he had discovered a mine of vast worth.

"I headed him off, ambushed him and he fell by my hand, while you nearly cost me my life, but, by mere chance, your bullet glanced, leaving an ugly scar, which you little dreamed that you had made, as I told you I had received it in a personal encounter in Mexico.

"But I did not die, and I went on the search for that mine; but in vain, and, disguising myself, I determined to find it by other means.

"Your son left a map of his mine and how to reach it, and you have never taken it from his coat pocket; but I do so this day, and more, I take with me your grandchild, Roy Ripley and Nellie's daughter, and so my revenge will be complete, for one day she shall become my wife.

"Now, old man, for your son's sake, I hate you, and leaving you to your sorrow and loneliness, I say farewell.

"DON, THE MONTE MAN."

As though shot through the heart, the old man fell upon the ground, and there he lay through the long hours of night; but with the dawn he arose, and when another night fell he was far on his way to the mountains, following the trail of the Monte Man and his captive—following it with a vow registered in heaven that he would know no rest until he came face to face with the fiend who had so cruelly wronged him.

And he it was—white-haired, in tatters, with no firearms, his brain in a fever, his heart aching, whom Buffalo Bill, the scout, met two years after in his wanderings in the wild fastnesses of the Montana mountains, still hunting for the lost trail of the two whom he called the Devil and an Angel.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE LOST TRAIL.

When Buffalo Bill heard the words of the old man he felt sure that he was mad, and yet there seemed



to be some powerful reason for his madness and his presence in that wild country.

The scout's kind heart was touched with compassion as he gazed upon the noble face and powerful form, and he determined to get from him just why he was there alone, in rags, with only a knife and bow and arrows as weapons.

He had heard strange stories of stranger mysteries that were connected with those mountains, and around the campfires of miners, scouts and soldiers, tales were told of rich gold mines hidden away in the depths of the wilderness, while all who had sought to find them never returned again to civilization.

Old trappers had related how they had seen phantom miners gliding through the mountains, with pickax and spade upon their shoulders, and others stated that they had come upon camps, around which were the bones of human beings.

Filled with a desire to see this mysterious land for himself, to trace these strange stories to their source, Buffalo Bill had asked for an unlimited leave from the commander of the fort, and, mounting Comrade, his best horse, and the fleetest on the border, it was said, he had gone forth alone.

He had not hurried his horse or himself, for he was amply stocked with ammunition and provisions, was prepared against the worst kind of weather, and meant to make the trip a holiday for himself, for there was no greater joy to the scout than in roaming over plain and mountains, alone with Nature, and facing dangers that might confront him.

He had been two days in the mountains, and was beginning to think that the tales told by the few hunters who had penetrated them were the offspring of a vivid imagination and superstition, when he found himself face to face with the old man who looked a veritable Rip Van Winkle.

"And so, after all, the mountains do hold a mystery?" muttered Buffalo Bill.

"The stories of phantom miners, of settlers who have dared to come here, have at least some foundation, for did most men, with the superstition ruling bordermen as it does sailors, behold this strange being, they would fly for their lives and protest that they had met the ghost of the Wandering Jew, or of old Rip Van Winkle, or the Devil himself.

"Now to see just why this old man is here, for, if there is a trail to find, perhaps I can strike it."

So mused the scout, while the old tenant of the hills watched him closely.

"Come, old man, let us go into camp together, for it is getting toward nightfall," he said, kindly.

"Buffalo Bill, can I trust you?" he asked, in a whisper, looking about him as though he was fearful some one would hear him.

"With your life you can, Rip Van Winkle," was the frank response.

"Rip! Rip! You call me Rip, and it seems so strange, so familiar, for I believe my name was something like that; so call me Rip Van Winkle; it pleases me."

"I will, sir; but now let us hunt a camp."

"It was to my camp I was going to take you, Buffalo Bill, when I asked you if I could trust you."

"I'll not tell any one, Rip."

"Come, then!"

And the old man started off at a rapid pace, that seemed surprising for one of his years.

"I'll ride, old gentleman, for you get over ground like an antelope," called out the scout, springing into his saddle and following.

"I had a horse once—Old Goliath was his name, and she named him that, changing it from Job, which I called him, as he was so patient and so good."



"I don't see that you need a horse, the way you go."

And the scout followed on after the old denizen of the wilderness, who was going at a swinging trot, following the ridge back from the cliff where he had found Buffalo Bill standing, gazing over the valley.

A half a mile brought them to a mass of piled-up rocks, which seemed to have been tossed up out of the earth by some convulsion of nature.

These apparently barred their way, but the old guide wound in among them, the scout following close, and soon they came to what looked like a bowl; at one time, evidently having the mouth of a crater in the mountain top.

There was a spring of crystal water bubbling in the center and falling back again, running off into a crevice in the rocks, while there were small trees around the edge of the basin and quantities of luxuriant grass.

On one side was a large cavern, and in a natural, chimneylike crevice in the rocks a fire was burning brightly.

In the cave was a bed of skins, a couple of ragged blankets, while an old rifle and revolver hung upon the rocky wall—useless for want of ammunition.

But the strange old hermit did not seem to suffer on this account, as there was ample supply of game, smoked, and fresh, hanging about the wall back in the cave.

Several bows, a quantity of arrows, and a lariat of horsehair, with an old saddle and bridle completed the furnishing of the cave, which was large, comfortable and dry.

Gazing upon the old man in pity, Buffalo Bill said, in his kindly way:

"I thank you for your welcome to your home, sir, and some day I shall expect you to return my visit;

but now, let me stake out my horse, which seems anxious to get at that juicy grass, and then we'll have supper, and talk over the lost trail."

The scout soon had Comrade free of saddle and bridle; then he brought from his haversack some coffee and provisions, for all the hermit had to eat was game.

"Come, Rip, that coffee will make a new man of you and clear the cobwebs from your brain, so that we can decide what is best to be done.

"But don't you keep a hot fire for the weather?" he asked, moving back from the blaze.

"It is my habit, for the fire in the entrance to the cave I keep burning all the time, as it drives wild beasts off, and there are many of them in these mountains."

Buffalo Bill noticed that the hermit had dropped the border dialect and spoke as an educated man, and he became more and more interested in this strange dweller in the mountains.

After a hearty supper the two sat together in the gathering darkness, and the scout said, to draw the hermit out:

"So you came here two years ago?"

"Buffalo Bill, my memory seems to be coming back to me now; I have met you before."

"So it seems to me; but I cannot place you, meeting you here, although I am not one to forget a face easily."

"You are the friend of Surgeon Frank Powell?"

"By Jove! you know Frank, then?"

"Oh, yes—very well."

"Then you know one of Nature's noblest works, old man, for Frank Powell is truer than steel—steadfast to a friend, and surer than death itself to a foe; but where did you know him?"

"You visited him at his cabin, near Sawdust City, some years ago, and——"



"I place you, old man! You are the Trapper Parson, that lived ten miles from Powell's, and we stopped one night and had supper with you."

"Yes; that is the only time I ever saw you, and it comes back to me now."

"You had your son, his wife, and their little daughter living with you, and we all had a happy evening, for they sang together, and I wondered how they could content themselves there in the wildest part of the West. But how is it I find you here, parson?"

The Hermit Parson was silent for a full minute or more, again passing his hand over his brow, as though to clear his thoughts, and then he began, and in a low, pathetic way, told Bill the story of his life, of the lives of those who were so dear to him, ending with his pursuit of the Monte Man and his fair, girl captive.

Not once did the scout speak, until he had heard the sad story, and then he said:

"Powell is no longer in the mines, as then, but gone up among the Indians, as a white chief, or I would ask him to aid me in this search for your lost trail; but, as it is, we must go it alone, Rip, or with such help as may come to hand, and I feel that if that man, whom you rightly called the Devil, is in these mountains, we can find him.

"Now, tell me where you lost his trail?"

"In the valley below, at the river."

"How many days were you behind him?"

"Three."

"And you tracked him to the river?"

"Yes, near the head of the valley, where it comes down from the cliff above in a fall."

"I see; well, we can take up the trail there, if it is two years old."

"But have you dwelt here ever since?"

"Yes."

"All alone?"

"Alone, as far as human beings are concerned," answered the old man; "but there is a ghost in these mountains."

"A ghost!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill; "you must be dreaming."

"No," said the trapper, shaking his head sadly; "there is a ghost in these mountains. There are no Indians here. The ghost has driven them all away, and it is deserted, save by me and the ghost."

"What does the ghost look like? Where did you see it?"

"A white specter, mounted on a snow-white horse, passes down the valley every night," said the hermit.

"The old man is mad," muttered the scout, as he turned in that night; "but I'll lie in wait and see if I can't get a glimpse of the ghost to-morrow night."

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## CHAPTER VI.

### LASSOING A GHOST.

Next morning both trapper and scout were up betimes. The whole day was spent in searching for trails. Each was anxious to discover both Don, the Monte Man, and the white specter the trapper had seen. Not the faintest sign of human footsteps, however, rewarded them.

It was near nightfall when they reached a clump of trees, near which the trapper said the ghost he had told the scout about on the night before generally passed, and they paused here a moment, as a sound had suddenly reached their ears.

The sun had long since gone down, and the moon was at its full; it sent a flood of silver light in the valley, so they drew back in the shadow of the trees, watching and waiting.



A muffled sound was heard, and Buffalo Bill said, quickly:

"It is the neighing of a horse," and, to carry him out in this, Comrade gave a low whinny and grew very nervous.

"Be still, Comrade, and don't spoil all," sternly ordered the scout, and in silence they waited.

"Look there!"

It was the Hermit Parson who spoke, and he pointed down the valley.

"It is a horse and rider," calmly said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, and——"

"You were going to say they are phantoms, and they look it, both horse and rider," and the scout gazed at them in amazement.

The animal was snowy white, and the rider was robed in white, from head down. They came on slowly, directly toward the clump of trees.

"Keep still, Comrade, and don't be nervous, for you may have to chase that phantomlike steed," said the scout to his horse, for the animal was now very uneasy.

"What are they?" calmly asked the old hermit, glad that the scout could see for himself that there were strange mysteries in those mountains that had so long been his dwelling-place.

"I do not know."

"What will you do?"

"I shall lariat the rider, and then catch the horse in a race; for, if he is real flesh and blood, Comrade can do it.

"Please hold the end of my lariat."

The hermit obeyed, and, taking the noose end, the scout coiled it carefully and turned his horse quietly so as to be able to throw the lariat strong and true.

The spectral-looking horse and rider were still coming on, in the same slow pace, and, following the

deer trail they were in, must pass within thirty feet of the clump of trees.

The moon shone in a cloudless sky, and not a sound broke the deathlike silence of the valley.

Nearer and nearer drew the specter steed and rider; then Buffalo Bill said in a whisper, as the Hermit Parson stood by the side of his horse:

"Now, Rip Van Winkle, you will see me lasso a ghost!"

As he spoke, he sent the lasso flying through the air.

When Buffalo Bill threw the lasso from his covert among the trees, he felt sure of catching the object of his aim, for no man on the plains could throw a lariat more skillfully.

True, he had never before tried to lasso a ghost, as this appeared to be; but his nerve did not desert him on that account, his arm did not lose its strength, and the coil went true and settled down over the shoulders of the white-robed form.

A shriek, as wild as a panther's cry, broke from the lips of the spectral-looking being, while the white horse, with a startled snort, bounded away, at the same instant that Buffalo Bill shot Comrade out of the ambush in chase.

The spring of the horse, with the tightening of the lasso, one end of which was held by the old hermit, dragged the ghost from the back of the animal to the ground, which it struck with a heavy thud.

Instantly the hermit was by the side of the prostrate form, and bending over it, while Buffalo Bill was flying away in hot pursuit of the white steed.

Glancing up, the one thus dragged to earth beheld the weird being bending above him, and a groan of terror broke from his lips.

Glancing down upon his prisoner, the hermit beheld a form robed in white, a hood over the head and two holes cut for the eyes.



"Man or ghost, who are you?" sternly said the hermit, and he drew back the string of his bow, while an arrow was set and pointed right down upon the prisoner so rudely taken.

"I hain't no ghost, Massa Debble, I only a poor nigger, dat's all, sah," came in trembling tones.

The hermit seemed to feel no fear now of his captive, and seeing that Buffalo Bill was returning with the captured horse, he said, sternly:

"Take off that hood and let me see who you are!"

"Yes, sah—I do it mighty quick, Massa Debble."

"Why do you call me the devil?"

"Hain't you him, sah?"

"No; I am a man like yourself, only more unfortunate than you," was the sad reply.

"I misfortunate 'nuff, sah, an' 'fore de Lord, I thought you was Ole Massa Nick, 'deed I did, sah, for I has heerd o' sich doin's in these mountains, I was prepared to see anybody, sah; but who dat comin' yonder wid my horse?"

"Buffalo Bill, the scout."

"Lordy! now my hoecake am cooked, sartin!" groaned the negro, who had taken the hood from his face and stood revealed in his proper person.

"What do you mean?"

"I means that Massa Buff'ler Bill got me dead ter rights, boss, and this nigger is gwine ter be shooted.

"I does wish I hed never left ther ole cotton plantation in Alabama ter go ter sojerin'; but, maybe he won't recognize me, bein' as 'most all niggers looks alike, sah," and the man trembled as the scout rode up and called out:

"Well, parson, I caught the phantom steed, and he's a good one, too; but what have you got there—a black ghost?"

"It is a negro, Bill, and you may find something out by questioning him."

The scout dismounted and approached the prisoner.

"Hello, Toby, what are you doing here?" demanded Buffalo Bill, recognizing the negro as a sergeant in a colored regiment, who had deserted some months before, to escape being shot for a murder of which he had pleaded ignorance, and which it was afterward proven he had not been guilty of.

"Massa Buff'ler, you knows me, sahr?" and the negro tried to turn his face away from the light.

"I should think so, for how could I forget any man who has done what you are guilty of?" and the scout looked sternly at the prisoner, determined not to let him know that he was aware of his innocence of the charge against him, and with this held over him, to make him useful to him, for he well knew Toby's pluck and endurance, and that he was noted as a trailer, being called at the fort the Sable Scout.

"Massa Buff'ler, I wasn't guilty, sah, and that's why I lit out, fer I didn't want ter be hanged up fer nothin', sah, so I deserted."

"And that is a shooting offense, Sergeant Toby; but I wish you to give an account of yourself, and, if I am satisfied you tell the truth, I will enlist you in my service and promise you full pardon for your crimes when you get back, if you serve me well."

"You kin do it, sah, yes you kin, and I'll jist sarve you from now until death day, sah."

"I believe you, Toby; but now, tell me what you are doing here, all robed in white like a ghost?"

"Massa Buff'ler, I sneaked off from the fort 'cause matters was lookin' dubious fer me, and I tried to hide in ther mining camps; but seemed to me folks kinder knowed me, and as I had heerd thar was gold up in ther mountains, I thought I'd come and find some.

"But I hed also heerd as how thar was ghosteses



and sich, and I didn't like thet much; but then I hed either ter risk ther ghosteses or hangin' fer murder I didn't do, and be tarned inter a ghost myself, and I concluded I'd come.

"Then ther idee struck me, Massa Buff'ler Bill, thet perhaps I'd do well playin' ghost myself, and I jist goes inter ther camp, buys me a full outfit o' shrouds, or muslin ter make 'em, buys a extra horse, with provisions, ammunition, a pick, ax and shovel, and comes into these durned mountains."

"Where did you get your money?"

"I were paid off, sah, afore I left ther fort, you recomembers, and I made a little more in ther mines, sah."

"All right; you came into these mountains to fight the devil with fire."

"No, sah, ter dig gold and ter play ghosteses myself, so as ter skeer off t'others."

"I see; but when did you get here?"

"Two days ago, sah."

"Where is your camp?"

"I goin' thar now, sah, for I hed been out on a tramp this arternoon."

"Have you seen any ghosts?"

"Massa Bill, I has."

"Well?"

"And I jist laid low, sah, fer there was five of 'em."

"Where did you see them?"

"Up ther valley, sah, in broad daylight this arternoon, and they was going along slow, ridin' white ghost horses, and my! but I was tremulous at sight of 'em, sah."

"You could find the place where you saw them?"

"Yes, sah."

"Well, we will go there to-morrow; but now understand that you are to serve me well, and in return I am to get you a pardon?"

"Yes, sah."

"No treachery."

"I hain't no two-faced nigger, Massa Buff'ler."

"No, I have always found you a square fellow—brave, and a good borderman, and a good Indian fighter, for you stood by me several times when your men ran off, and it surprised me to think you would kill a poor army settler and rob him," and Bill spoke with mock seriousness.

"Fore de Lord, sah, I didn't do it!"

"Well, I'll have to take your word for it, so now we'll look up your camp."

"Yas, sah; but won't de ole gem'man who I tuk fer de debble ride my horse, sah?"

And Toby looked askance at the Hermit Parson, who had stood by in silence regarding him attentively during his talk with Buffalo Bill.

"No, my man, thank you; I prefer to walk."

"I got another animal at my camp, sah, so I kin ride him," urged the colored sergeant; but the Hermit Parson still declined, and the three set off together toward the camp.

It was found hidden away in a vale, and, getting his traps together, Toby divided them up so that the hermit should ride his pack horse, which was really a very fine animal.

Then the three set out for the camp of the old man on the mountain ridge, and were turning into the trail leading up from the valley when suddenly there came the rapid clatter of hoofs, the ringing neigh of a horse and the loud bark of a dog.

An instant more, and there dashed by in the moonlight a snow-white horse, with some object strapped upon his back, and running ahead of him was a huge black dog.

"Here, take these things, and I will give chase, while you follow me."



And away Buffalo Bill dashed like the wind, in chase of the mysterious dumb pards—the white steed and the black dog.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE DUMB PARDS.

When the scout set off in hot pursuit of the horse and dog that had dashed by them down the valley, he felt confident of soon solving that mystery at least.

He knew the speed of his splendid horse and his endurance, and he had yet to see the animal that could hold the lead of him in a long run.

In chasing the white horse, from whose back the negro, Toby, had been so rudely dragged by the lariat, Buffalo Bill had run alongside of the animal and grasped his bridle rein before he had gone the eighth of a mile.

Now, he settled himself in his saddle and urged Comrade on, and the noble horse fairly flew along the trail.

But the white steed and the black dog held their own, and, with a hundred yards start, seemed resolved to keep it.

As the scout shot out into the bright moonlight the dog gave a startled yelp, and the horse a neigh, as a note of alarm, and their speed increased greatly, for they had been going at the pace of a sweeping gallop.

"Come, Comrade, you are not doing well," said the scout, urging on his horse, when he saw that he was not gaining.

And the noble animal responded by warming up to his work, and pushing ahead with greater speed.

Still he did not gain.

"Why, Comrade, what are you about? On, sir, on!" and Buffalo Bill just touched his flanks with the spurs, and the noble beast fairly bounded forward

in tremendous leaps, as if he felt that his master was angry with him.

Still, the dumb pards ahead gained slowly, and the scout could see it.

"I must have that horse, for, Comrade, you have at last more than met your match," the scout said, firmly.

Once or twice he half brought his rifle around, as though to use it, but, quickly checking the intention, he said:

"No, it would be sacrilege to kill either the horse or the dog; but I must have them, and I will, if I stay in these mountains for months."

Then, to see if Comrade could really increase his pace, and noting that the horse and dog had doubled the distance they had held, he spurred his own beast sharply.

But, though Comrade snorted with anger and strained every nerve and muscle, the two strange pards ahead held their own steadily.

"Ah! my poor Comrade, I am driving you hard, and for no use—— Ha! they have disappeared!"

It was true, for just as the scout was about to draw rein and give up the chase, the dumb pards disappeared.

So he rode hastily on to the spot where he had last seen them flying along in the moonlight.

Just here were piles of rock and scattering clumps of trees, while the trail they had been following reached the river and ran along its banks.

But he could see for some distance along the bank, and he knew they had not gone that way.

But there was but one other way they could go, unless they had dodged behind some of the rocks and trees, and were hiding, and that was into the river, which here dashed swiftly along.

To go into the river, they must take a leap of some



ten feet, and the scout could not believe they had done that intentionally, but perhaps gone over by accident.

So he looked among the rocks and trees, that could afford a shelter, and then returned to the river bank, just where the trail curved, and arrived there as the Hermit Parson and Toby rode up.

"Well, they have gone?" he said, in a disappointed tone.

"Your horse could not overtake them, Buffalo Bill?" asked the hermit.

"No, sah, in course he c'u'dn't, though I knows what Comrade kin do, but then them animiles hain't human," urged Toby.

"No, Toby, they are not human, but belong to the brute creation," the scout said, smiling at Toby's remark.

"Dey ain't real brutes, nuther, Massa Buff'ler, but phantoms, and as Comrade didn't cotch 'em it proves dat."

"Where did they go?" asked the hermit, with interest.

"I saw them last just about here, and, as they had steadily gained on me, in spite of all I could do, I determined not to worry my horse, and was about reining up when they suddenly disappeared.

"They did not go down the trail, for we can see a long distance, and they are not hidden among the bushes or rocks, for I have looked."

"Then, they could only go over here into the river?"

"That's it, parson."

"And are lost?"

"No, sah, them hain't lost, I knows, for water don't drown, bullet don't kill, and fire don't burn things like them.

"No, sah, them is spirit animiles!"

"No more than were you a ghost, Toby, and I will yet prove it to you; but, parson, suppose we camp here on their trail for the balance of the night, so as to be on hand at daybreak and see what tracks they have left, though, according to Toby, their trails will not be visible?"

"As you please, Buffalo Bill, for I think it would be a good idea," answered the Hermit Parson, and the three sought a hiding-place for their horses among the rocks and stunted pines, and then threw themselves down upon their blankets, only a few yards from the trail which the dumb pards had followed in their rapid flight.

The scout lay awake for some time, and his thoughts were busy with the discoveries he had made in those mountains, which he had not believed inhabited by mortal man.

He had looked upon the stories told by the Hermit Parson as imaginings of a diseased brain, and yet he had certainly seen proofs that there were most unfathomable mysteries in that weird land.

He had met there the old mad trailer, he had discovered the colored soldier, Toby, and he had seen for himself the mysterious dumb pards.

He had come into the Montana mountains in a spirit of adventure, and he was not one to give up a trail until the end was reached, especially when there was a stern duty to perform in rescuing the poor little Wild Rose from the power of the man who had kidnaped her, after slaying her father and causing the death of her mother.

The Trapper Parson had tracked them into these mountains, and to a certain point, and then the trail became a lost trail.

Buffalo Bill had tried his skill in ferreting out the mystery, but he could go no further than had the old hermit.



The trail had an ending surely, but that was not it. There were others certainly in these mountains, but where were they?

Don, the Monte Man, had come there with his captive, and yet he had not left there, the Hermit Trapper felt certain.

Altogether, the brave scout had a world of thought, with mystery at the bottom of all, a seemingly unfathomable bottom, as he lay awake in his blanket, while near him peacefully slumbered Toby, and the Hermit Trapper lay motionless, but also awake.

Presently, the scout dropped off to sleep, and his repose was undisturbed until dawn was stealing over the valley and paling the moonlight.

Then he awoke, for a sound broke on his ears, ever alert, even in sleep.

He raised up and saw that the Hermit Trapper was also aroused.

It was the rapid clatter of hoofs, and they were coming toward where they were.

"Up, Toby, for some one is coming," Buffalo Bill ordered.

"It's the hoof falls of that wild horse, for I know them well," said the hermit.

To reach their horses and mount would be impossible, in the short time they had, the scout knew, so he said, quickly:

"We must lasso him, then. You, parson, try for the horse with me, and, Toby, you take the dog."

Buffalo Bill knew that the negro soldier was noted as a lariat thrower, while he was not so sure of the Hermit Parson, never having seen him throw a rope, so he asked him to try for the horse.

Their lassos were at hand with their saddles, and quickly they seized them and sprung to position behind the nearest rock or tree facing toward the trail.

A moment more, and the black dog appeared in sight, and behind him came the white horse.

They were dashing swiftly along with the wind, so the keen senses of the dog had not caught the scent of their foes.

"Golly! but dat am a big dog ter tackle!"

"I think he's a grizzly," said Toby, but he had his lasso ready to throw.

A moment more and the dumb parads were in range, and all was ready for the word from the scout to cast the lariats.

"Now, throw, and the dumb parads are ours!" cried Buffalo Bill, in thrilling tones, and the three lasso coils went whirling through the air.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### FOUND AND LOST.

When Buffalo Bill gave the word to throw, the three lassos left the hands of the three men at the same instant.

The negro soldier's aim was to lasso the huge black dog, and he aimed well, for the noose settled over the brute's head.

The Hermit Parson and Buffalo Bill both aimed to lariat the white steed, and their aim, too, was true, for over the small head, down upon the arched neck the coils settled.

The scout's quick glance told him that all three lariats had fallen true, and then broke from his stern lips an exultant shout, which Toby, the soldier, echoed with a wild halloo, though the Hermit Parson gave no cry.

The cries of exultation, of triumph in their success, certainly seemed merited, and yet they had been, to use border slang, a "trifle too previous."

And why?



Toby had not put on his belt of arms, in seizing his lasso, and the moment the noose settled over the head of the dog, the brute gave a savage yelp and bounded directly for the negro.

Toby was as brave as a lion where mankind were concerned, but he did have a holy horror of dogs and snakes.

And such a dog!

A brute of enormous size, with long, white, glittering teeth, and a shaggy hide like a bear.

In that sharp, vicious yelp, half growl, half bark, he showed just how furious he was, and he made directly for Toby, almost before the noose could be tightened to drag him to earth.

Toby had not made his lariat fast—in fact, he did not see the need of it in lassoing a dog—and, as the huge brute came bounding toward him, the negro dropped the rope and deserted the field.

To fly from so swift an animal he knew was useless, and shoot him he could not, so he made his exit from earth by means of a tree; springing up to a limb and catching it, he drew himself out of the dog's mouth just in the nick of time.

In the meantime, Buffalo Bill had made his lasso end fast to a small sapling, growing in the rock, while the Hermit Parson had simply held one end in his hand, and the effect was surprising, for the shock of bringing the horse to a halt tore up the little tree by the roots, and jerked the old trapper off his feet.

In an instant, the splendid animal had sprung away, towing the two lariats, to one of which was trailing the little sapling which had been so rudely torn from its hold among the rocks.

Seeing his horse companion flying away, the dog had given up a premeditated attack upon the scout and trapper, for he had started toward them, and went bounding after the white steed, also trailing the lariat after him.

"Lost them both, so we did!" cried Buffalo Bill, running toward his horse and seizing his saddle on the way.

"No use ter chase 'em, Massa Bill, fer they hain't ter be tuk," answered Toby, dropping from his perch in the tree.

"I'll try, at least, and, parson, you and Toby come on as fast as you can."

And Buffalo Bill soon had Comrade bridled and saddled and set off in hot chase.

With the dog drawing the lasso and the horse a small sapling, the scout felt hopeful that they would both be caught in some way, and he rode on at the full speed of his horse, while the trapper and Toby also followed, but at a slower pace, the latter riding his pack horse.

The dumb pards had disappeared from sight before the scout had mounted, but then he knew that such a trail as they would leave could be very readily found and followed.

The sun was now above the horizon, so that the darkest shadows of the valley could be penetrated, and, with the day before them, Buffalo Bill was assured that some discovery should be made regarding this strange mystery of the mountains.

For some distance he dashed along, Comrade running easily and very rapidly, and seeming himself to be anxious to overtake the two animals which had dropped him behind so easily in his last chase of them.

Presently the spot came into the view of the scout where the horse and dog had disappeared on the other occasion, and he knew as he approached the bank that they had again eluded him, for there was no hiding-place there for them.

A moment more and he drew rein upon the bank overhanging the swiftly-flowing stream.



There lay, neatly coiled, the three lassoes, the little sapling was standing against a rock near by, its branches scarred and leaves torn by being dragged over the ground, but nowhere visible were the dumb pards.

They had disappeared most mysteriously.

To do so, they must spring from the bank a distance of ten feet into the swiftly-flowing waters of the river, for the trail turned neither to the right nor left, but ended just there.

Soon the Trapper Parson and Toby came up and found the scout standing there in deep meditation.

He seemed slightly bewildered by what had happened.

"You got the lassos, but not the animals?" said the trapper, inquiringly.

"I found those three lassos lying there, coiled just as you see them, and the little tree the horse pulled up by the roots, standing just there," answered Buffalo Bill.

"The dog and horse could not coil the lassos," said the trapper.

"No; only a human being could have released them and placed the ropes there."

"It was sperrits, Massa Buff'ler, that's what it were," Toby said, anxiously glancing about him.

"But you could not have been more than two or three minutes behind the animals, Buffalo Bill?" said the trapper.

"No; and whoever took off the ropes worked fast, but where did he go, and where are the dumb pards?"

"This is the only place they could reach the river to jump in, for see how rough the bank is above and below, and a mountain goat could hardly find footing there."

"True, parson, and their trails lead right here, as you see."

"Yes; and they sprang into the river?"

"Yes—they could do nothing else.

"No, parson, there is a mystery about this, and if the dog and horse went into the stream, the man who took off their lassos did the same, and where one man went another can go."

"Do you mean that you will go into the stream?"

"Yes, parson, and you and Toby camp yonder in that thicket and get breakfast, while I take a little swim," and Buffalo Bill quickly divested himself of his clothing, wrapped a revolver in a waterproof rubber cloth, placed his lasso about his waist, and sprang from the bank into the stream.

He was swept down the stream like a flash, and soon whirled out of sight of the trapper and Toby, who were watching him.

He was swept along by the swift current for several hundred yards, the banks still steep and impassable, and they seemed so for a long distance below.

But he was watching them closely, and his eyes fell upon a break in them, and he swam toward it.

And just in time he put forth his strength, for otherwise the current would have swept him by.

It was a narrow chasm in the rocky wall, which served as a bank; but the footing was good, and he saw that the landing was easily made.

The rocks were wet, and for some distance, showing that the horse and dog had landed there, and by making the leap into the river above, had thus eluded capture where the trail ended.

"Those brutes have been well trained," muttered Buffalo Bill, "to thus seek safety in flight, and double upon a pursuer.

"I will see where this trail leads me, and can perhaps head them off at this landing next time."

He followed the water-dripped trail for some dis-



ance, when it ceased, and he had to depend upon the tracks of the animals.

These led to a cavern in the rocks; but seeing daylight beyond the scout boldly ventured into the dark place and came out upon a broad plain, or meadow land, and from here he could find no direct trail, though the animals had evidently crossed it.

Glancing about him he recognized a lightning-riven tree in the distance, which he had observed not far from the spot they had camped in during the night, and he made his way toward it, struck the trail along which the dumb pards had been dashing when he parted, and an hour after parting with the parson and Toby, put in an appearance before them.

They had breakfast waiting, for they had expected he would soon return, as he was not in scouting costume for a long tramp, and he sat down to it with relish, while he told of his discoveries, remarking:

"Now we can capture that noble pair of animals by starting in chase, when we see them next, and then heading directly for the landing.

"There are rocks there which we can hide on, drop our lariats over the heads of the horse and dog and take them into quiet, when we can tie them secure—and they are our sure game."

"It looks so, certainly," said the trapper, while Toby remarked:

"The rope hain't made, Massa Buff'ler, ter tie dem animiles wid, for dey is sperrits sartin."

"Well, Toby, we can try, and my opinion is when we capture them we will discover some secret of who their masters are that we are anxious to know."

Buffalo Bill, Providence sent you here, and I hope now that I will find my little Wild Rose.

It may be days, weeks, months perhaps, before I find it, but I know you will solve this mystery—I feel sure," said the trapper, earnestly.

"I hope so, parson, and we won't say die until there is no hope."

"I wish we was huntin' fer somethin' that wasn't sperrits," said Toby, and the scout laughed heartily, at the fears of Toby, and remarked:

"Why, Toby, you played ghost yourself, and you see how we cowned you, and you'll find that there is nothing but humbug at the bottom of these mountain mysteries, and, in my opinion, they have good cause for wishing to keep people out of this wild land.

"But we are here to stay, to settle, to die, if need be," and the stern, resolute face of the scout showed that he meant just what he said.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CUNNING CAPTIVES.

The next evening Buffalo Bill, Uncle Toby and the mad trapper were at their posts again, waiting for the arrival of the dumb pards, who, they believed, would pass that way again, as on the previous night.

They made all preparations possible, deciding that this time the mysterious horse and the dog which accompanied it would not escape them.

No sign of either horse or dog, however, was seen that night, and the three watchers had their long wait in vain.

"Never mind," said Buffalo Bill, "this is our only way of solving the mystery. We must have patience and wait.

"The next time that we get our lariats about the throats of these dumb pards we must see that we keep tight hold of them."

"We can sleep in the daytime and watch by night," said the mad trapper.

"We'll nebber cotch dem animiles, Massa Bill,"



said Toby, "and I'm scart to stay in dis ha'nted valley, but whatever you says goes."

And so for nearly a week the trio watched carefully the trail which they knew the dumb pards must sometimes pass over.

At length one clear, moonlight night, when they were sitting chatting and smoking at their post, a clatter of hoofs was borne to their ears by the wind.

"Up, Toby," said Buffalo Bill. "It's now or never, Trapper. Are your lariats ready?"

Both Toby and the parson were soon prepared, swinging their long lassos, and a moment later the dumb pards came into sight in the bright moonlight.

They had posted themselves behind some trees, and were hidden from the two animals.

"Toby, you can try your hand at the dog again," said Bill.

"Berry good, sah," said the negro.

"Parson, you and I will try for the horse. Are your lariats both fastened to the trees?"

"Mine is," said the Hermit Trapper.

"Mine's fast, sho' enoff," said Toby.

And now the dumb pards were in range, and Buffalo Bill swung his long lariat about his head.

"Throw, and don't let them escape you this time!" he cried.

His lariat went flying through the air, quickly followed by the other two.

All three sped true to their aim.

Horse and dog were going at such speed that the lassos closed about their throats in an instant, choked them and threw them upon the ground.

"At them, boys! Bind them!" cried Bill.

He threw himself upon his horse, followed by the hermit.

"Here's whar I tackle de ghost again, and I habn't no time to say mah prayers," muttered Toby, as he hurled himself upon the big dog, which had not yet risen to its feet.

"We've got 'em!" cried Bill.

When the old trapper saw that Toby had secured the dog all right, and Buffalo Bill had the horse in his

coil, he skillfully threw his lasso over the fore feet of the animal, as he reared, and he was at once brought to terms, for the noose had tightened about his throat and was choking off his breath.

"Hold him well, parson, while I slip down and secure him," cried the scout, and he soon had the lassos firmly binding the noble animal.

He then turned him over to the parson, who had also come down into the chasm, and went to help Toby, who kept the dog half-suspended, by holding the lasso as high in the air as he could, so as to place him beyond resistance.

The dog was also secured, and both animals were led around to the camp, where the captive horse was lariatied out between two lassos, giving him just the slightest amount of freedom.

The dog was also tied in the same way, between two trees, and feeling that they were secure the trio of strange comrades took from the back of the white steed a pack saddle which was firmly strapped there.

In each ear of the horse hung a ring of silver, which marked him at once as having some connection with some mystery, while about the neck of the dog was a collar of the same precious metal, welded on.

"You didn't see if there was a motto on the dog's collar, did you, Toby?" asked the scout, as he took the pack saddle toward the campfire among the rocks.

"No, sah, I didn't, for I wasn't 'zam'nin' thet dog's collar too close, as all I wanted ter do was ter git him tied afore he come to fer bitin' work.

"I tell yer, Massa Buff'ler, thet dog are big a bear and stronger than a lion."

"He is a bad dog, Toby, and I am very glad were able to secure him as we did."

"He came back to his senses mighty quick arter got him tied and quit chokin' him."

"Yes; he is a dangerous brute, and that horse vicious, Buffalo Bill, and, but for his knowing w him bound, muzzled and hobbled, he would



fought like a wolf," the trapper remarked, as they reached the campfire and sat down before it, the scout placing the pack saddle in the glare of the light to see what it contained.

"Ah! this tells a secret," he said, as he drew out from a leather pouch in front of the saddle a slip of paper.

It bore no address, but simply was an order for ammunition, provisions and half-a-dozen miner's picks without handles.

At the end was the line:

Do not forget to send papers and some books.

There was no signature, but a well-drawn circle instead.

"Ah! that is a carrier steed, and thus, much of the secret is solved," said the scout, as he opened the leather flaps of the pack saddle.

But the pouches were empty and nothing more could be discovered to give a clue to just who the horse had come from, and where he was going.

"What do you make of it, Buffalo Bill?" asked the trapper, as the scout had completed the search.

"That these dumb pards are most thoroughly trained, the one a guide and guard, the other a carrier steed, and they belong to those who are united by this mystic silver band or circle."

"And can you make out just what it all means?" eagerly asked the trapper.

"That a band of men, how many I cannot of course even guess at now, are hiding in these mountains for some purpose of their own, and that they have allies in the settlements this paper proves, for it is a direct order for some one to send back these things, and the horse is to be the bearer," said the scout.

"That looks like goshil, Massa Bill," Toby said.

"It seems the only solution to me, and my idea is to mount that horse and let him carry me to this secret camp."

"Will he do it, Buffalo Bill?"

"I think so; but if not, we can hopple both the horse and the dog, so that we can follow them at a distance."

"Yes, we can do that."

"But perhaps the best way would be to begin in the settlement."

"How do you mean?"

"To find out where the dog and horse go."

"It must be Sawdust City?"

"Yes, doubtless; and if I can find out who is the ally there, I can force him to reveal what I would know, and, if this mountain band are numerous, I can get a force from the fort to whip them out."

"You are right, Buffalo Bill; the starting point to solve this mystery will be in the camp to which the dog and the horse are sent."

"Yes, parson, I think so; but in the morning we will see just what we can do with those dumb pards; but now we all need rest."

And so the trio, tired out but triumphant, soon had laid themselves down and were sound asleep.

Their horses were little more than a lariat's length away, and in the bright moonlight lay the white steed, held by a lariat upon either side of him, drawn taut.

In the shadow, between two trees, was the dog, crouching down, as though asleep, and also held by two lines.

But before lying down to rest it would have been well for the scout to have taken a glance at his dumb captives, for the dog was by no means asleep, but quietly gnawing at one of the lassos fastened into his silver collar.

He seemed to be asleep, crouched upon the ground, and his head bent to one side; but the lasso was in his mouth, and the sharp teeth were slowly cutting the strands.

Every fall of a leaf, every sound caused him to be on the alert, and he was cunning and cautious as an Indian captive trying to make his escape.

At last the lariat parted, and still keeping the same position, he began upon the other.

This was soon in twain, and, rising, he crept slowly toward his dumb pard, who seemed to understand just what was going on.



The horse was lying down, the lariats on either side drawn taut, and an improvised bridle upon his head and about his neck.

But the dog stood close up to him, and the gnawing process was begun once more.

He soon had his comrade free, and with a neigh of joy the horse sprung to his feet, while he bounded away after the dog, who was leading the way, yelping with delight.

In an instant Buffalo Bill and his companions were upon their feet, and they caught a glimpse of the dumb pards as they disappeared in an adjacent thicket.

"You remain here and watch for their coming, for they will go to the river again.

"I will press them there.

"Get your lariats, quick, and be ready," and the scout threw himself on the back of Comrade, without saddle or bridle, and dashed away in pursuit.

He got the white horse in view once more, as he gained an opening, and pressed rapidly on.

The dumb pards took the same old trail, and headed straight for the river bank.

The scout was but a couple of hundred yards away when he saw them go right over into the stream.

## CHAPTER X.

### CAPTURED AT LAST.

It was with bitter disappointment in his heart that Buffalo Bill turned back to his two comrades.

"We must not give up, parson," he said. "We must find your granddaughter."

"My granddaughter?" said the old man. "Do you think that those dumb pards could lead us to her hiding-place?"

"There is, in my mind, a band of men in these mountains united from some peculiar cause, and whose interest it is to keep all others away, and hence their acts to frighten those who might come here," said Buffalo Bill.

"Now, your grandchild, parson, may be with this

band, for here you tracked her, and the man who kidnaped her; but that we must find out, and we will, and my idea is that by capturing the horse and the dog, is our best plan to start with.

"So, Toby, go back to your post, and should you again see a horseman, looking like a ghost, run to him, not from him, and you may solve the riddle."

And Buffalo Bill turned to Toby, who gathered up his rifle and blanket, and, returning to his post of duty, once more stood on guard, while the parson and the scout soon after retired to rest.

But, trained to awaken at any given time, Buffalo Bill was awake at the hour to relieve the soldier and went to the post.

"Anything moving about, Toby?" he asked.

"No, sah—only wolves, and they is ravin' distracted this night."

"I am glad they did not have a feast on human flesh; but now go to rest, and I'll stand the night out, so don't disturb the old parson, as I notice he puts on his best licks of sleep just before dawn."

"Yas, sah; but he do seem to keer precious leetle for sleep, anyhow."

And Toby started for camp, leaving Buffalo Bill on duty as a sentinel.

Standing in the shadow of a tree and resting against it, the scout was as motionless as a statue of marble.

But, though he was lost in deep thought, his ears were open to the slightest sound and his eyes swept the moonlit space about him constantly, for mechanically he seemed to see and hear, so thorough had been his training as a plainsman.

Suddenly he started; his attitude was that of listening.

"It is the horse and his dog pard," he said, as the beat of hoofs reached his ears.

Then the sound ceased, wild howls were heard, loud and savage barking, the neighing of a horse, the yelps of half-a-hundred wolves.

Like a deer, Buffalo Bill sped toward the scene.



repeating rifle in hand, and in a few moments he came upon a strange sight.

Against a wall of rock was the dog at bay, springing upon any wolf that approached him, and by his side, his heels pointed outward, his head pointed toward the rock, was the superb white horse.

About them were a half-hundred wolves, ravenous and preparing to rush upon the two dumb pards.

Such an unequal struggle could end but one way, and Buffalo Bill went to the rescue with a will to do good work.

As he dashed out of the shadow of the pine thicket he began to "pump" the bullets out of his repeating rifle, and every shot dropped a wolf.

When the click announced that the rifle was empty he drew a revolver in each hand, and these, too, rattled forth lively music as the frightened wolves darted away, leaving a number of the pack dead upon the scene.

The moment his weapons were empty, the scout halted and began to hastily reload, at the same time gazing intently at the dumb pards.

These two seemed to realize that they had met a friend, and they gazed at the scout intently, as he stood some fifty feet distant.

Then, as if to thank him, they gave vent to a neigh and a yelp and darted away.

In vain did he call after them, for they heeded not; and he said aloud:

"Now, to give chase, and then get back to the ravine to head them off, for they are sure to follow the old trail."

As he spoke he saw the trapper and Toby coming on horseback, and leading his faithful animal.

They had heard the rattle of the firearms and had quickly come to the support of the daring scout.

"Parson, you ride on in chase of the horse and the dog, and after they run toward the trail that breaks at the river, return with all haste to our camp, where we will go and have all ready to meet them as they land, and lariat them," said Buffalo Bill, taking no time for explanation.

Afar off the white horse was still in sight, dashing on, and the trapper started in chase, while Buffalo Bill himself returned quickly to the camp.

In a short while they had hitched their horses, and were mounted upon the top of the rocks which crossed the narrow ravine, or chasm, leading to the canyon.

There were stunted pines growing there, and to these the ends of their lariats were made fast, as also that of the Hermit Trapper, so that all would be ready immediately on the latter's return.

"You take the dog, Toby, and you can soon choke him quiet, when we can tie him to a tree and tame him.

"I will take the horse, and I will drop the loop over him quickly from here, for I do not wish him to hurt himself against the rocks.

"Once he is choked down, we can tie him, too, and try the taming process.

"If either of us fail to catch our game, the parson can come in on the homestretch, so we are sure to get them."

Such was the scout's explanation, and then they stood in waiting.

Soon there came the echo of hoofs and the trapper dashed up to the camp in the rear, hitched his horse and quickly came up to the top of the rocks.

"Well?" said the scout, interrogatively.

"They made the leap as usual, Buffalo Bill," the other responded.

"Then we have little time to wait.

"There is your lariat, parson, fast to that tree, and if Toby or I fail to catch our game, then you drop your coil.

"If we do catch on, then your lariat will come in well to help one of us, or both."

"All right, Buffalo Bill," said the trapper, and he took his stand further along on the rocks, and he held his coiled lasso in hand.

Soon a splashing sound was heard some hundred feet away, and a moment after, peering through the branches of the pine tree that shielded him, Buffalo Bill saw the dog trot into view, and then came the horse.

"Ready!"

He whispered the word, and all was then as still as death, each of the three men standing ready, lasso in hand, and with their eyes fixed upon the two dumb pards seen in the ravine below.

Nearer and nearer they came, the huge dog some twenty feet in advance, and both going at a slow pace, while the water dripped from them.

"Now!"

With the word from Buffalo Bill, his lariat and that of Toby fell upon the animals below.

Squarely over their heads they went, and were



then drawn taut with such rapidity that neither the horse nor the dog had the chance to make much of a spring, and this was especially satisfactory as regarded the horse, who was brought to a halt before he had an opportunity of bounding away, to be brought up with a shock that might have harmed him in some way.

"They are ours!" cried Buffalo Bill, exultantly, as he saw that at last the dumb pards were in his power.

## CHAPTER XI.

### CONCLUSION.

This time the dumb pards were tired out with the struggle they had made and too weak to resist their captors as vigorously as before. The dog was soon choked into submission.

It was even easier subduing the horse, for it seemed to recognize Buffalo Bill as a friend.

It whinnied softly as the scout laid his hand on its mane and vaulted easily upon its back.

"Loose the lariat, Toby," said Buffalo Bill—"the horse will obey me now."

Toby loosed the rope, and the scout slapped the horse on the flank.

It trotted forward at an easy pace, and the dog, which was also thoroughly quieted, trotted meekly at his side, although Toby, who had mounted, as had the old hermit, kept a respectable distance from him.

"We will soon solve the mystery now," said Buffalo Bill. "This horse, which is a splendid animal, will lead us to its owner, and I hope to your daughter."

"I hope he may," was the Hermit Trapper's devout prayer.

In single file, the three riders, the dog and Buffalo Bill's horse, which, at a word from the scout, trotted close by his side, passed through the little ravine, and then turned sharply to the right.

There was no trail, but the horse evidently knew its way.

Through a clump of trees it passed, then through another narrow passage between two tall rocks, which were completely hidden by the trees.

Then it led the way out into a grassy meadow, came to a standstill in front of a small log cabin and whinnied softly.

A young girl appeared at the door, and, in a sec-

ond, the mad trapper had leaped from his horse and thrown his arms about her.

It was Rose, his kidnaped daughter.

\* \* \* \* \*

A moment later, with Rose mounted on the extra horse, the party were retracing their steps from the hidden valley.

The girl had told them that they had found her in the hiding-place of a den of outlaws.

"They are called the Bandits of the Silver Circle," she said, "and Don, the Monte Man, who is their chief, kidnaped me while my grandfather was absent, and kept me here. In the daytime the men are all at the mines near by, but they may return at any moment. They would kill you all and take me prisoner again."

"Let us turn back, then," said Bill. "I will never rest until the band is broken up, and, as soon as I can make sufficient preparations, I will return to finish the work I have commenced."

On the way back to the mad trapper's camp, Rose told the story of her kidnaping.

The Bandits of the Silver Circle killed all who came into the valley, she said, in order to keep any one from discovering the mines which they were working.

Every week they sent the magnificent white horse which Buffalo Bill now rode to the nearest mining settlement, his saddle bags filled with gold dust.

A landlord of a tavern there, the girl said, a friend of Don, the Monte Man, was secretly in league with them and sent them provisions, using the dumb pards as carriers.

The horse and the dog had been carefully trained to make the journey alone, and at night.

The bandits had done all they could to make people think that the valley was haunted, and so had kept it lone and deserted.

Rose and her grandfather never tired of showing their gratitude to the great scout for his rescue of the girl.

"Never mind saying anything more about it," said Buffalo Bill. "I only did my duty."

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 55) will contain: "Buffalo Bill's Bonanza; or, The Clan of the Silver Circle." How the great scout broke up the outlaw band, covered the mine rightly belonging to the murdered Roy Ripley, and restored it to his daughter, was told in this story.





# THRILLING ADVENTURE



Look out, boys! Here are a few more thrillers that will make your hair stand on end. If you don't want a cold shiver to run down your back, don't read them, for that's what's liable to happen to you if you do.

The new contest is humming along grandly.

Keep it going, boys. You are responsible for its success. Look on page 31 for a list of prizes and directions how to win one.

## A Double Escape.

(By Harold Lover, Ohio.)

While riding in the Talcott Mountains last July, exercising a pair of young and nervous horses, I had a hairbreadth escape from death by having my brains knocked out and also drowning. William, the coachman, had his hands full keeping them to the road, which was very steep and narrow. On our return trip a trace slipped off and William got out to fix it while I held the horses. Just then a squirrel ran across the road, and they started to back. William jumped to their heads, having fixed the trace, and succeeded in quieting them. Then he started to get in, but no sooner did they have their heads than both went flying down the hill in spite of all I could do. The suspense was awful, for I expected nothing else but having my brains dashed out on some boulder.

At length we reached a level strip along the reservoirs that supply Hartford with water, and here they seemed to fly. The pneumatic-tired runabout bounced over the rough road and I was momentarily in danger of falling out and that is just what I did. A ditch about three feet wide had been boarded over and in crossing this two wheels did not connect, and I was tipped out and down the steep bank into the water.

I was dazed, but managed to get to shore and up the bank, where I met William. After drying my clothes we started home, a walk of eight miles, which we reached at seven o'clock. The horses had arrived an hour before, and the singular part of it was not a thing was broken. I was laid up for a day, but count my escape a pure case of luck.

## Adrift On the Bay.

(By Carl Dannenburg, N. Y.)

It was a hot summer day in the month of August when I and a friend of mine resolved to go boating in New York Bay. We had about fifty cents, so we walked down to the bay.

When we had looked all over Bowling Green and had seen the Aquarium our fifty cents had been reduced to twenty-five.

At last my friend went up to several boatmen, but nobody wanted to hire a boat for a quarter.

We came across an old sailor who was willing to let us have a boat for a half hour.

"All right," we answered. Then the sailor showed us an old boat which had once seen better days, but now it was not painted, and the oars were in very bad condition. But what could we expect for twenty-five cents?

But we did not care, for we jumped into the boat, and we began to row away from the shore.

We rowed about a half mile when my friend started to speak.

"Why not row over to Bedloe's Island?"

"All right; but won't it take too long?" I asked.

"Oh, the old sailor don't care," my friend answered, so we started to row for Bedloe's Island. When we were about in the middle of the bay the waves began to pitch our small boat up and down like a nutshell. My friend, who was more of a seaman than I, told me to take an old tomato can which was lying in the bottom of the boat and bail out the water, which was coming into the old tub rapidly.

The waves pitched our small boat higher and higher every minute; we might sink. We were doing all we could do to keep the old tub afloat, for our lives were at stake.

The storm lasted about an hour when the water began to grow calmer. Then we began to row for the shore, but that was not easy, because the storm had driven us far out in the bay. We also were soaking wet.

But after rowing hard for an hour, we managed to get our boat anchored. Then we jumped out of the boat, and we were once more safe and sound ashore.

## Three Shots That Missed.

(By E. V. Early, N. C.)

About three years ago, when my brother and I lived in the little village of Navesink, N. J., we narrowly escaped from an adventure with our lives.

It happened in this way: We were coming home from the post office one night in October.

We saw a man in front of us who was so full of the bad whisky that he walked like a three-legged parrot, as my brother said at the time.

Well, we thought we would have some fun with him, so we began mocking him, reeling about from one side of the lonely road to the other. My brother had been eating an apple, the core of which he now flung at the man ahead. This core landed with a "squash" on the soft part of his ear. At first he did not know what struck him, and he began to hoe it down. I have never since seen a man dance with so laughable a step, and hardly expect to witness such a performance again. I hope I never do.

My brother and myself started laughing, and nearly split our sides, at the sight of his ludicrous movements. This made him mad. Then before we realized what was happening we heard a sharp "crack" sound forth on the still night air.

Our laughter stopped instantly, for we saw something glitter in the soft moonlight. It was a large pistol, the calibre of which we never stopped to investigate.



We made for the asparagus patch at one side of the road as fast as our feet could carry us. Another shot whizzed by us, as we entered the half-dried-up branches of the seed asparagus plants.

When he saw we had gone he gave us chase; he chased us, running very unsteadily. We gained ground all the time. He saw he was losing and fired again. Again the bullet missed us.

We had by that time reached the edge of the woods and entered the bushes.

We were too tired to go much further, and, after a short, whispered "palaver," hid in the undergrowth.

This was the best thing we could have done. He came rushing by us, so near us that we could have touched him, as he went by, had we half tried.

We waited breathlessly until he had passed almost out of hearing. We suddenly heard a great crashing sound near and then, "crack! crack!" rang out on the still night air.

We took our chances, then, and "struck out" for home. We had heard five reports, and rightly judged that his round had given out. We arrived home safely.

We recognized him, and the next morning we went to his house. He said that he had not known what he had been doing, and that he would leave rum alone if we would keep it a secret, especially his name.

With his last two shots we found he had killed one of his own hogs.

He has not exactly kept his promise, but I have never heard of him getting drunk since, although he takes a little occasionally.

### Chased By a Panther.

(By Davy Messersmith, Kentucky.)

About two years ago a small gang of boys used to go about two miles back of town to an old vacant coal mine and dig coal. We would go out in the morning and come back at evening. We had been going out there for about a week.

One day we did not go out till about two o'clock. I was the first to enter the mine, and as I went in I heard something, and did not pay any attention. I heard it again and I took my lamp and walked back, and my eyes met something shining.

I began to get frightened and went back out and called to the other boys who went in. I did not go back.

All of a sudden I heard the boys coming. I began to run, and being the smallest, I could not run so fast, so they all got ahead of me. I looked back and saw something coming, jumping. I did not know what it was. But a moment later I saw it was a panther.

We had to get through a wire fence to get out of the field, and as I was going through the fence I got caught. The panther was within a few rods of me. I heard some one coming and looking back saw a man with a gun. He saw my danger and raised his gun and shot the panther, wounding him badly. He turned then and made his way back. The man cut me loose and I went home.

Everybody said it was a dog that had chased me, but the next morning some men went out and found the panther stretched out upon the ground, dead.

### My Adventure With a Mexican Lion.

(By Conrad Goss, Texas.)

Two years ago I lived near El Paso, Texas, a half mile from the Rio Grande River. I was then fourteen years old. On my fourteenth birthday my father made me a present of a fine new Colt's Winchester, and mama a pretty little Pinto pony, when my cousin, Ned Boren, came to visit me for a month or two from Chainey, Texas.

So on my birthday we planned a big hunt. Just us two. The morning was bright and clear, and "Two Eyes," our Indian servant, woke me at four. As I had to go up in the pasture and get Ned a horse and bring back a bunch of two-year-olds, I got back about five-thirty, and we had our lunch all fixed up, and Ned got on his pony and he began to buck.

Well, the first jump Ned flew head over heels and landed with a jolt on the back of an old milk cow, who politely gave him a punch in the side for his impudence, and Ned refused to

mount unless I rode him first, so I got on him, and after a short tussle succeeded in breaking in the little brute.

We finally got off, and we were just across the Rio Grande when Ned's pony gave a snort and tried to run. Well, I knew at once that he had scented a wild animal of some kind. We had hardly dismounted when a huge body shot from a tree across the road and landed on my back, knocking me down.

Ned was so scared he didn't know what to do. I was not knocked senseless. But I couldn't do anything with a 200 pound Mexican lion crouched on my back growling at Ned.

But Ned recovered directly and taking aim fired at the beast. He only broke his shoulder, and the lion flew at him and knocked him down, and I grabbed my new Colt's Winchester to try on him when what was my chagrin to find I had left my cartridges at home. Ned's gun was not loaded, and besides, it was under him, so, drawing my knife—a large hunting knife I always take hunting—I flew at the lion and after getting a torn arm and lacerated shoulder, succeeded in killing him, and revived Ned with some water from my canteen.

### Killing a Mad Dog.

(By Louis Mathis, Illinois.)

In the year 1901, on the evening of a hot, sultry day, I was returning from a riding party with some friends, passing a farmhouse and being thirsty, we stopped to get a drink. No one appeared to be at home. All of the party had a drink, and were returning to their horses but myself.

Securing a drink and leaping into the saddle, I was about to follow the rest when my horse sprang to one side. Glancing around, I beheld a huge dog, the froth dripping from its mouth. I instantly hit my horse and started for the road, the dog following. Drawing a Smith & Wesson from my pocket, I fired, hitting him in the breast.

Staggering a few steps, he fell dead. The rest of the party, hearing the shot, turned back. That is as near a mad dog as I ever wish to be.

### Lost In a Mine.

(By Ray Fuller, Iowa.)

Last summer I went to Colorado to visit a friend of mine. One day he said:

"Ray, suppose we go over to a mine and get some specimens?"

I consented to go, and we set out for an old, unused mine. When we arrived at the mine, my friend, Arnold, had forgotten a candle. We could not get any specimens, for it was too dark to see to dig them out. He looked around and at last found a piece of a candle. We went back in the mine and soon turned off from the main passage into a branch tunnel.

We kept on and soon found a place where we could dig some iron out. We each got a pocketful of specimens and started back. My friend said we would have to hurry as the candle was getting short.

We walked back toward the entrance but soon the candle burned out, leaving us in the dark. We had to move more slowly now and feel our way along the side of the tunnel.

Presently we came to a branch tunnel which we had not noticed when we came in.

"Ray," said my companion, "which way shall we go, straight ahead or turn into the branch tunnel?"

I, being from the East, could not give him much satisfaction. At last we decided to go straight ahead. After a while the air became foul and the floor of the tunnel became covered with water. We waded along and soon got out of the water.

After walking a few minutes, we were amazed to find we were back at the same place as we started from. We had come out of the branch tunnel.

"Arnold," said I, "what do you think about it?"

"I am afraid we are lost," said he.

"Lost!" That one word sent a feeling of horror over me. Lost in the heart of a mountain. We had gone on straight ahead, gone around in a circle and came out the branch tunnel.

Suddenly we heard a sound. What was it? Some one to lead us into safety or some wild animal to destroy us? I pulled



my companion back into the tunnel. Presently we saw two balls of fire. A form of a mountain lion crept by us. Where he had come from we could not tell.

"Arnold, suppose we follow him? Maybe he will lead us out."

We crept after him, and suddenly he stopped and looked back. The shining eyes glowed like red coals.

The lion moved on again and presently we came to another tunnel. Looking into this tunnel, we beheld those fiery eyes. When the lion started we crept after him.

Great was our joy when we beheld the light of day streaming in from the entrance. When we reached the entrance nowhere could our rescuer be seen.

### An Adventure at a Fire.

(By Mortimer Barnes.)

It was a cold, rainy night in the month of September, 1901. We had all retired for the night. I had been asleep for a long time. When my mother came running into my room and awoke me. She said:

"The is' and is afire."

I sprang out of bed at once, and going to the window, saw the summer hotel and theatre afire. It was a grand sight to look at. I lost no time in dressing myself. I was soon on the scene, and like the others, I began to help save the furniture from the hotel. I had saved a number of articles, and was standing looking at the flames roar. When the proprietor's wife came to me and said:

"Mortimer, go and get the cash register."

"All right," I answered, and started on the errand. I found the register on the counter, and it was too heavy to carry. After I had tried for a while to open the drawer by pounding at the lock, I got tired and gave up. I made my exit from the room, for it was getting too hot. I got out and stood looking. After a while the roof went in with a crash and sent a shower of sparks in the air. If I had been a minute longer in the building I would not be writing this adventure.

### A Crooked Finger.

(By Garnet Brown, Minnesota.)

I am now fifteen years old and have a very crooked finger. One day my older brother and I were chopping some meat for the hens when I dropped my knife.

When I reached for it my brother accidentally chopped my hand and cut three of my fingers, one of which pretty nearly dropped off.

I ran for the house, but fell and knew no more until I found myself lying in bed with my hand all done up in a cloth. My brother ran a mile for my father, but before he got back my mother had stuck my finger back in its place with some court-plaster.

I never want as painful a wound again in my life.



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